Democratic Transitions in the Levant: Prospects for Restoring a Regional Order

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ABSTRACT

The 2011 Arab uprisings exacerbated conflict and turmoil in the Levant, with the civil war in Syria constituting the dominant event in the region since that point in time and drawing the surrounding countries into its destructive vortex. The changes wrought by the uprisings have intermingled with the pre-existing conflicts in the Levant and with new local and pan-Middle Eastern confrontations in pernicious ways. Among the outcomes of this crisis are that Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine —whose current political situations will be addressed in this paper— are experiencing a rise in authoritarianism. However, this paper argues that the Levant will not overcome its current disorder and regain a degree of order —in the sense either of stability or of recognized rules governing relations between regional actors— unless Levantine states undergo a degree of democratization, meaning they adopt some degree of accountability, pluralism and respect for basic freedoms and good governance. Democracy is closely linked to the emergence of peace and security but is also a condition for them to endure.

Keywords: Democratization, Authoritarianism, Levant, Regional Order, Arab Uprisings, Conflict.

Levant'da Demokratik Değişim: Bölgesel Bir Düzenin Onarılmasına Yönelik Beklentiler

ÖZET

2011'de başlayan Arap ayaklanmaları, bölgenin öncelikli konusu haline gelen Suriye'deki iç savaşın komşu ülkeleri de yıkıcı girdabına çekmesiyle birlikte Levant'taki çatışma ve karmaşa biraz daha arttı. Ayaklanmaların şekillendirdiği gelişmeler, Levant'ta önceden var olan çatışmaları Orta Doğu'nun tamamına yayılan yeni yerel ve milliyetçi çatışmalarla birbirine karıştırdı. Yaşanan krizin sonuçlarına bakıldığında; Mısır, Suriye, Lübnan, Ürdün ve İsrail'de artan düzeyde otoriteryanizmle karşılaşılmaktadır. Bu makalede, Levant'taki devletlerin hesap verilebilirlik, çoğulculuk ve temel özgürlüklere saygı ve iyi yönetişim gibi unsurları benimseyerek bir demokratikleşme evresinden geçmedikçe, Levant'ın mevcut düzensizliğin üstesinden gelemeyeceğini, istikrar ya da bölgesel aktörler arasındaki ilişkileri düzenleyen genel geçer kuralların hâkim olduğu bir düzene geri dönülemeyeceğini iddia etmektedir. Demokrasi, barış ve güvenliğin ortaya çıkmasıyla yakından bağlantılıdır, bunun yanı sıra bu faktörlerin sürdürülmesi için de bir ön koşuldur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Demokratikleşme, Otoriteryanizm, Levant, Bölgesel Düzen, Arap Ayaklanmaları, Çatışma

Introduction

The modern period, and particularly after the emergence of the state-system in the early part of the twentieth century, has undermined the unity of "the Levant." The region consists of very disparate polities; there are few similarities between the political systems of the countries that comprise it, namely Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey[1] and Cyprus. When it comes to social make-up and ideological orientation, the differences are equally or even more profound. Long-standing and seemingly intractable conflicts — between Israel and the Palestinians and between Turkey and Cyprus — permeate the Levant and constitute some of its seemingly permanent fractures. More recently, broader Middle Eastern confrontations have also had an impact on the Levant: the geopolitical clash between the Iran-led and Saudi-led camps, the ideological conflict between Muslim Brotherhood groups in various countries and their opponents, as well as the struggles between Islamists and secularists. The internal fragmentation of the Levant renders it vulnerable not only to these wider Middle Eastern confrontations but also to intervention, either directly or by proxy, by global actors such as the United States, Russia, or European states.

The 2011 Arab uprisings exacerbated conflict and turmoil in the Levant, with the civil war in Syria constituting the dominant event in the region since that point in time and drawing the surrounding countries into its destructive vortex. The changes wrought by the uprisings have now intermingled with the pre-existing conflicts in the Levant and with new local and pan-Middle Eastern confrontations in pernicious ways. These developments, taken together, have seemed to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the state boundaries that have defined the region over the past one hundred years or so.[2] It is, therefore, not really convincing to speak of an order prevailing in the Levant, either in the period before 2011 or, even less so, since then. If anything, we can refer to stability or, more accurately, a degree of immobility prevailing between the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1990 and the Arab uprisings of 2011. Although even that had been punctured by armed conflicts between Israel and Hizbullah in 2006 and between Israel and Hamas in 2008, the Levant collapsed into a veritable disorder by 2011.[3]

I argue that the Levant will not overcome this disorder and regain a degree of order — in the sense either of stability or of recognized rules governing relations between regional actors — unless the states comprising it undergo a degree of democratization. Democracy is closely linked to the emergence of peace and security but is also a condition for them to endure. This may seem uncontroversial but, in fact, the opposing point of view has prevailed thus far in large parts of the Levant; that authoritarianism, not democracy, is a *sine qua non* for a regional order, or stability. However, what we have seen — most spectacularly in Syria — is that authoritarianism, by undermining society's capacity to negotiate conflict peacefully, leads to instability and chaos.

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1   Only Turkey's southern regions are conventionally considered part of the Levant. Turkey is treated in Chapter 7 of this volume as an intervening regional actor and will therefore not constitute a focus of the present chapter.

2   Martin Beck, Dietrich Jung, and Peter Seeberg, "Introduction", Martin Beck, Dietrich Jung and Peter Seeberg (Eds.), *The Levant in Turmoil: Syria, Palestine, and the Transformation of Middle Eastern Politics*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p.1-13.

3   There is a long-standing debate in International Relations on the concept of order, international and regional. I will not engage with these theoretical concerns in the present paper but see, for example, Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, London, Macmillan, 1977; Barry Buzan and Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez (eds.), *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2009.

In this paper, I do not take democratization to mean the emergence of full-blown democratic systems. Rather, I interpret it as entailing a degree of pluralism, inclusiveness and accountability that allows for peaceful coexistence in domestic society and an adequate functioning of a given political system. I see democratization as being dependent on a degree of political elite consensus or intra-elite consensus on the creation of reasonably well-operating institutions that allow for a measure of civil society participation (loosely defined) to counter-balance top-heavy regimes, all in the context of a collective commitment to the broader national good.[4] The last point is important because, despite the frequent emphasis on the fragility and artificial nature of the system of states in the Levant, there are no alternatives to it (a point poignantly illustrated both by the rise and the demise of the so-called Islamic State or *Daesh*). The challenges to the existing borders in the Levant come from the Palestinian and the Kurdish national movements, both of which seek national self-determination and the establishment of new states.

Discrete Political Trajectories in a Fragmented Region

The polities comprising the Levant are disparate and find themselves at different points in the evolution of their political systems with regards to democratization. Cyprus has been partitioned since the Turkish intervention of 1974 but is nevertheless a mature democracy and member of the European Union; it will therefore not be included in the following discussion. Turkey will also be excluded for the reasons outlined above.

When looking at potential democratic transitions in the Levant, it is possible to distinguish loosely between two clusters of states. On one hand are Syria and Egypt, states that experienced major changes in 2011 but are currently witnessing, albeit for different reasons and in different ways, a rapid return to authoritarianism. A second group of countries – Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and Palestine – did not undergo major upheavals in 2011 but have experienced strains as an indirect result of the uprisings and their reverberations both in the Levant and in the wider Middle East.[5] The six countries are examined, one by one, below.

Egypt

The protesters in Tahrir Square were not raising many placards with the word "democracy" but they did demand freedom, dignity and, indirectly, accountability, representation and good governance – some of the constituent parts of a democratic system.[6] The anti-corruption discourse that permeated the rebellion was closely linked to the demand for social justice, a response to the perceived growing

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4   The Lebanese system (variously described as confessional, sectarian or consociational) arguably offers a possible model for democratization. However, despite the fact that such a system allows for the existence of some political space (and, as such, can allow for a degree of liberal politics), it also renders society prone to fragmentation and – particularly in a region such as the Levant – vulnerable to outside intervention. Furthermore, it is not conducive to democratization and liberalization within the distinct communities that comprise the political system.

5   Katerina Dalacoura, "The 2011 uprisings in the Arab Middle East: political change and geopolitical implications", *International Affairs*, Vol.88, No.1, 2012, p.63-79, Katerina Dalacoura, "The Arab Uprisings Two Years On: Ideology, Sectarianism and the Changing Balance of Power in the Middle East", *Insight Turkey*, Vol.15, No.1, 2013, p.75-89.

6   Kamal E. O. Salih, "The Roots and Causes of the 2011 Arab Uprisings," *Arab Studies Quarterly,* Vol.35, No.2, 2013, p.184-206, Jean-Pierre Filiu, *The Arab Revolution: Ten Lessons from the Democratic Uprising,* London, Hurst, 2011; Bassam, Haddad *et al., The Dawn of the Arab Uprisings: End of an Old Order?* London, Pluto, 2012.

inequality in the Egyptian economy and society writ large, but also to the lack of democratic governance.[7]

The overthrow of the authoritarian regime of Hosni Mubarak in February 2011 appeared to bode well for democratization in Egypt, but two pre-existing problems contributed to undermining its prospects. The first was that Mubarak was removed with the connivance of the Egyptian military after it recognized the unsustainability of his regime.[8] This led to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) taking control of the levers of power from February 2011 to June 2012, which prepared the ground for the military's return to power in July 2013. The second problem was that popular mobilization in 2011, tremendous though it was, took place in a de-politicized context that was characterized by a weak civil society.[9] Although some analysts would dispute this assessment – pointing to movements such as "6 April" and "We are all Khaled Said", as well as the labour protests that had gained momentum in the years prior to the rebellion – it remains true that Egyptian civil society was unable to organize to offer a counter-weight to the counter-revolutionary forces that emerged after 2011.[10] The same can be said about Egyptian opposition parties, with the exception of the Islamists.

The superior organizational capacity and the implicit message that, as "good Muslims", they would be able to deliver on the social justice demands which had underpinned the uprising,[11] opened the way to electoral success for the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Salafi Islamist groups such as al-Noor. Together these parties secured approximately seventy-five percent of the vote in a string of parliamentary elections from late 2011 to early 2012.[12] Muhammad Morsi, a Muslim Brotherhood leader, was elected president of the Republic in June 2012.[13]

The de-legitimation of the FJP was rapid during its one year in power (June 2012-July 2013),[14] but the fact that it was overthrown by a military coup has undercut the prospects of democracy in Egypt (however popular this coup may have been among large segments of the Egyptian citizenry). President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who led the coup, was elected to the presidency by a huge percentage (claimed to be over 90 per cent) in May 2014, yet he is presiding over a repressive and increasingly

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7   International Crisis Group, *Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East: Egypt Victorious?*, Report No.101, Cairo and Brussels, International Crisis Group, 24 February 2011; Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*, New York, Public Affairs, 2012.

8   Dalacoura, "The 2011 uprisings", p.70.

9   Joel Beinin, "Civil Society, Ngos, and Egypt's 2011 Popular Uprising", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol.113, No.2, 2014, p.396-406.

10   Dalacoura, "The 2011 uprisings", p.68.

11   Carrie R. Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2013; Khalil al-Anani, *Inside the Muslim Brotherhood: Religion, Identity, and Politics*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2016; Tarek Masoud, *Counting Islam: Religion, Class, and Elections in Egypt*, New York, NY, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

12   BBC, "Egypt's Islamist parties win elections to parliament", 21 January 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-16665748 (Accessed on 2 February 2018).

13   For example, in November 2012, thousands of protesters gathered in Tahrir Square to protest Morsi's decision to grant himself sweeping powers to oversee country's transition. See David D. Kirkpatrick, "Named Egypt's Winner, Islamist Makes History", 24 June 2012, *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/25/world/middleeast/ mohamed-morsi-of-muslim-brotherhood-declared-as-egypts-president.html?mtrref=www.google.co.uk&gwh=316F4 E3AB874CF0195A2660AEB7EC117&gwt=pay (Accessed on 2 February 2018).

14   David D. Kirkpatrick and Mayy El Sheikh, "Citing Deadlock, Egypt's Leader Seizes New Power and Plans Mubarak Retrial", *The New York Times*, 22 November 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/23/world/middleeast/egypts-president-morsi-gives-himself-new-powers.html?_r=0 (Accessed on 2 February 2018).

authoritarian government that has outlawed the Brotherhood and increasingly incarcerated political opponents, whether they be secular or Islamist or from the right or left. The government has also stifled civil society: the NGO law of 2016[15] is more restrictive than any such laws Mubarak had installed and NGOs are further undermined by a discourse which depicts them as "foreign agents".[16] New legislation on public protest, on terrorism, and on the military courts has wreaked havoc on civil freedoms and the press and social media are increasingly muzzled. Parliament has been emasculated, extra-judicial killings abound, torture is rife, and the number of political prisoners runs into the tens of thousands. Some secular political parties have been co-opted by the regime, as they fear it less than they fear the Islamists, and now operate in a tightly controlled game.[17] The political space between the regime and the Islamist opposition – the latter not being paragons of democracy either – has shrunk. The only shoots for a possible return to democracy can be found in single-issue organizations, professional and trade union associations, and among some leftist and liberal activists who are resisting regime co-optation – but are themselves fairly weak. The hopeful days of 2011 have passed and Egypt appears to have come full circle as the country experiences a greater level of oppression than it did under Mubarak.

Syria

The Syrian revolt began in March 2011 with similar demands to those in Egypt: the desire for dignity, accountability and social justice.[18] However, the regime's violent response to the protests, just as they began to spread, further fuelled the confrontation, which quickly degenerated into violent conflict. Whereas the regime was "unitary and cohesive", the society was "heterogeneous and, to some degree, divided" since the regime had worked hard for decades to "bolster unity at the top", binding the army and security services to it and forging networks of capital, while at the same time exacerbating the divisions of "sect and ethnicity, class or region" within the society.[19] The al-Assad family and its clique ruled the country through fear and patronage, forming alliances of convenience with various segments of the Syrian population. In such a setting, civil society was unable to develop in any significant way, despite the heroic struggles and sacrifices of some individuals and groups, particularly in the years immediately before 2011. As a result, the knives were out very quickly in 2011, undercutting the possibility of a peaceful resolution.

The al-Assad regime held together to a large extent because it had the backing of the army, which did not fracture, as well as support from a number of sections of Syrian society, not least the

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15 The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Egypt NGO law: UN expert warns about growing restrictions on civil society", 11 October 2016, http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20665&LangID=E (Accessed on 31 January 2018).

16 Khaled Dawoud, "Understanding the Dangers of Egypt's NGO Law", *Atlantic Council,* 7 December 2016, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/understanding-the-dangers-of-egypt-s-ngo-law (Accessed on 1 February 2018).

17 Michele Dunne and Amr Hamzawy, "Egypt's Secular Political Parties: A Struggle for Identity and Independence", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 31 March 2017, http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/03/31/egypt-s-secular-political-parties-struggle-for-identity-and-independence-pub-68482 (Accessed on 20 November 2017).

18 For background analysis of the cause of the revolt, involving the regime's changing economic policies and the configuration of their social base, see Hinnebusch, Raymond, *Syria –Iraq Relations: State Construction and Deconstruction and the MENA States System*, LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series No.4, London, London School of Economics, 2014, p.20-21.

19 Bassam Haddad, "The Syrian Regime's Business Backbone", *Middle East Report,* No.262, 2012, p.26.

Christian and Alawite minorities fearful of being targeted by the Sunni majority, which was seen as the backbone of the revolt.[20] The regime has also formed a tacit alliance with the Syrian Kurdish minority; the latter has fought *Daesh*, a radical Islamist formation that emerged in Syria in 2014. The opposition to al-Assad has been comprised of radical groups such as *Daesh* and affiliates of al-Qaeda, moderate Islamists such as the Muslim Brotherhood,[21] and secular groups. It has been divided along ethnic lines (Kurdish versus Arab[22]), ideological lines (various hues of Islamists[23] and groups from the right and left of Syrian society) and sectarian lines (between Sunnis and those fearful of Sunni domination). Paramilitary organizations "of all ideological stripes and political allegiances" have sprung up among the Kurdish, Sunni, Druze and Christian communities.[24] Regional powers, such as the Gulf States and Turkey, and jihadist groups, have "hijacked" the original movement inside Syria and exacerbated divisions.[25]

The combined effects of the profoundly authoritarian nature of Syria's politics and the internecine carnage that has unfolded since 2011 undermine the prospects for democratic transition in the country. Syria has a very weak democratic legacy to draw on in the first place. Elections have traditionally been used as instruments of regime legitimation and conduits of patronage, with parliament being effectively a sham institution. This has continued in a different way since the eruption of the civil war. The elections of 2014 that "confirmed" al-Assad's presidency as well as the elections held in April 2016 in government-held areas[26] showed that elections had now become an instrument of war for the regime. Having said that, the country will not be able to move into any semblance of normality or peace without a degree of democratization, broadly conceived. This may be helped by the fact that, paradoxically, the war has opened up some space for popular mobilization, in the form of hundreds of local councils, as Syrians have had to organize themselves to survive.[27] That the route to peace goes through democratization is recognized in the UN Security Council Resolution 2254, which called for peace in 2015 and asserted the need for "credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance" and "free and fair elections."[28] The various formal and/or informal attempts at conflict

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20   See e.g., Nicholas Frankovich, "Deposing Assad Could Hurt Syria's Christians", *National Review*, 23 June 2017, http:// www.nationalreview.com/corner/448912/syrian-civil-war-assad-christians-oppose-efforts-depose-him (Accessed on 31 January 2018). The picture is not always clear regarding whether Syrian Alawites support the al-Assad regime. See Caroline Wyatt, "Syrian Alawites distance themselves from Assad", *BBC*, 3 April 2016, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/ world-middle-east-35941679 (Accessed on 31 January 2018).

21   Yehuda U. Blanga, "The Role of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Syrian Civil War", *Middle East Policy*, Vol.23, No.3, 2017, p.48-69.

22   Numerous others, e.g. Turkmen, who started getting organized after the uprising, supported by Turkey. See unpublished paper by Funda Karadeniz, "Turkey and Turkmens in 'New Middle East Cold War': A View from the Kin-State", 3rd Middle East Congress on Politics and Society, Sakarya University, 11-13 October 2016.

23   International Crisis Group, *Tentative Jihad: Syria's Fundamentalist Opposition*, Middle East Report No.131, Damascus and Brussels, International Crisis Group, 12 October 2012.

24   Omar Dahi, "Some Days before the Day after", *Middle East Report*, No.274, 2015, p.18.

25   Ibid.

26   John Davison and Laila Bassam, "Assad Holds Parliamentary Election as Syrian Peace Talks Resume", *Reuters*, 13 April 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria/assad-holds-parliamentary-election-as-syrian-peace-talks-resume-idUSKCN0XA2C5 (Accessed on 22 November 2017).

27   Ghias Aljundi, *Local Governance Inside Syria: Challenges, Opportunities and Recommendations*, London, The Hague, and Washington, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 2014, https://iwpr.net/sites/default/files/download/publication/ iwpr_syria_local_councils_report_web.pdf (Accessed on 31 January 2018).

28   United Nations, *Security Council Unanimously Adopts Resolution 2254 (2015), Endorsing Road Map for Peace Process in Syria, Setting Timetable for Talks*, SC/12171, New York, United Nations, 18 December 2015, https://www.un.org/ press/en/2015/sc12171.doc.htm (Accessed on 23 November 2017).

resolution that have taken place in Istanbul, Geneva, Astana, and elsewhere also demonstrate that democratic processes will be a driver of any sustained peace.

The underlying question here is whether democratization will take place within the pre-existing boundaries of the country, in other words, without the country fragmenting. The likelihood of the country fracturing by formal secession is thin, at least in the short to medium term. What may well happen, however, is that distinct territories become autonomous and, to all intents and purposes, self-governing. This is effectively already occurring in parts of northern Syria controlled by Kurdish forces in the territory called the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria or *Rojava* ("west" in Kurdish).[29] It also happened in the territories governed by *Daesh*,[30] which filled a void, though this is now dissipating. For some, such autonomization of parts of Syria offers the only realistic prospect for the country to hold together in future and thus should be formalized in new constitutional arrangements. There are two options here, either a federal system or a confessional system of the Lebanese variety. Neither of them will work, in my view. It is difficult for the former to be implemented without a measure of ethnic cleansing to create homogenous populations in given territories; this has already happened but could accelerate if formalized in a peace agreement. A confessional system would also prevent democratization internally in each community and, more importantly, render Syria continuously vulnerable to intervention from outside forces intent on supporting their ethnic affiliate, co-religionist or political ally on the ground, thereby encouraging instability in the long term. This has been the predicament of Lebanon.

Lebanon

Lebanon's political system, variously described as confessional, sectarian or consociational, functions on the basis of pre-agreed institutional arrangements and a division of power between the country's eighteen recognized religious and ethnic communities. Political positions and segments of the state are split along community lines and each community has a degree of autonomy in its internal affairs, specifically in education and family law.[31] One of the consequences of the system — in place since Lebanon's creation in the 1930s and reaffirmed by the Taif Accords of 1989 which ended the Lebanese civil war[32] — is the weakness of the Lebanese state, in terms of the coercive mechanisms at the state's disposal, such as the army, intelligence services and police. The state's lack of coercive power, however, has opened up a degree of political space, particularly in the areas of free speech and civic freedoms, which have left Lebanon, in some ways, a freer country than other Middle Eastern states

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29 Mireille Court and Chris Den Hond, "Experiment in Self-rule in Rojava", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 5 September 2017, https://mondediplo.com/2017/09/05rojava (Accessed on 23 November 2017).

30 Peter Harling, "Islamic State Fills Middle East Void: IS Back in Business", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 28 August 2014, https://mondediplo.com/2014/09/04islamicstate (Accessed on 24 November 2017); Charles C. Caris and Samuel Reynolds, *ISIS Governance in Syria*, Middle East Security Report 22, Washington, DC, Institute for the Study of War, 2014; Mara Revkin and William McCants, "Experts weigh in: Is ISIS good at governing?", *Brookings Institution*, 20 November 2015, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2015/11/20/experts-weigh-in-is-isis-good-at-governing/ (Accessed on 22 November 2017).

31 Carol Hakim, *The Origins of the Lebanese National Idea (1840-1920)*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2013; Reinoud Leenders, *Spoils of Truce: Corruption and State-Building in Postwar Lebanon*, London, Cornell University Press, 2012.

32 Lebanese Presidency, "The National Accord Document – The Taef Agreement", 4 November 1989, http://www.presidency.gov.lb/Arabic/LebaneseSystem/Documents/TaefAgreementEn.pdf (Accessed on 31 January 2018)

that have suffered from the heavy hand of the state.[33] As a result, civil society in Lebanon is vibrant.[34] A negative aspect of the system, however, is that each community continues to be hierarchically ordered internally, and socially conservative attitudes endure even within the civil society organizations. Lebanon's confessional system also leaves the country vulnerable to foreign intervention, as individual communities become proxies for outside powers, perpetuating political fragmentation.[35]

The Taif Accords of 1989 signalled a new phase in Lebanese politics, one that became increasingly marked, however, by an emasculation of democratic institutions, such as they were. Under the over-lordship of Syria, which for all intents and purposes controlled the country after the end of the civil war, the sectarian division of power continued albeit with a modified balance between the communities reflecting the weakened position of the Maronite Christians at the end of the war. The politics of Lebanon came to be dominated by the powerful Shia sectarian militia Hizbullah, which became almost a "state within a state", enjoying Iranian support and leading the "resistance" against Israel.[36] The departure of Syria from Lebanon following the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in February 2005 did not significantly alter Hizbullah's position. Horse-trading and an often muscular manner of negotiation continued to characterize Lebanese politics, resulting sometimes in long periods of instability or a vacuum of power at the top. The political stalemate between the Hizbullah-centred March 9 coalition and the Sunni and Saad Hariri-centred March 14 coalition caused growing paralysis, especially after Hizbullah gained veto powers on government policy in May 2008.[37] Hizbullah's strategy toward Lebanese state institutions has been "to fill them, keep them empty or render them unworkable"; a strategy intended to create a vacuum within these institutions with a view to neutralizing opposition.[38]

The 2011 rebellions did not directly affect this state of affairs, given the absence of significant unrest in Lebanon, which saw only a few relatively small protests calling for political reform. The rebellions would have a profound indirect effect on Lebanon, however, as the civil war unfolding in neighbouring Syria caused a flood of refugees to stream towards the country (an approximate 1 to 1.5 million coming into a country of 6 million). Providing for such a number of refugees has put an enormous strain on the country's resources.[39] It has also led some of Lebanon's Sunni minorities to turn to extremism, mirroring to an extent the situation in Syria and in particular the rise of *Daesh* as well as the al-Qaeda-linked *Jabhat al-Nusra* — renamed *Jabhat Fatah al-Sham* in July 2016 after severing links with al Qaeda — and to the spill-over of violence from Syria into Lebanon. It also sparked off tension between Sunni extremists and Hizbullah (tit-for-tat bombings, kidnappings and

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33 Michael Young, "The Lebanon Exception", *Carnegie Middle East Center*, 19 July 2017, http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/71565 (Accessed on 23 November 2017).

34 Civil Society Facility South, "Mapping Civil Society Organizations in Lebanon", 2015, http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/lebanon/documents/news/20150416_2_en.pdf (Accessed on 1 February 2018).

35 Beverley Milton-Edwards and Peter Hinchcliffe, *Conflicts in the Middle East since 1945* (3rd ed.), London and New York, Routledge, 2008, p.60-74.

36 Katerina Dalacoura, *Islamist Terrorism and Democracy in the Middle East*, New York, NY, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p.81-93.

37 Tim Butcher, "Hizbollah's Lebanon veto power boosts Iran's Middle East influence", *The Telegraph*, 21 May 2008, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2001235/Hizbollahs-Lebanon-veto-power-boosts-Irans-Middle-East-influence.html (Accessed on 3 February 2018).

38 For a vivid example of the situation in 2014, see David Gardner, "Lebanon on the Brink", *Financial Times*, 16 May 2014, https://www.ft.com/content/66d483fe-dbbd-11e3-b112-00144feabdc0 (Accessed on 24 November 2017).

39 UNHCR, "Syria Regional Refugee Response, Lebanon Country Profile", 30 June 2017, http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122 (Accessed on 23 November 2017).

beheadings),[40] deepening division and suspicion between Lebanese communities and damaging the prospect of re-establishing working political processes.

The second indirect way in which the Syrian civil war has impacted domestic Lebanese politics is through the changing position of Hizbullah as a result of its active military involvement in Syria on the side of the al-Assad regime and in alliance with Iran. Since 2011, Hizbullah has been fighting on the side of the Bashar al-Assad regime, in tandem with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's loyal forces, the al-Quds Brigade of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, led by General Qasem Soleimani. Its involvement in Syria has made it "turn eastwards", away from Lebanon and towards Syria.[41]

A deepening Middle East-wide confrontation between Iran and Saudi Arabia (with Qatar and Turkey caught in the middle) took hold alongside the unfolding Syrian Civil War. This confrontation would play out to a degree inside Lebanon. In November 2016, Michel Aoun, one of the Maronite leaders with a close relationship with Hizbullah, acceded to the Lebanese presidency which had remained vacant for over twenty-nine months.[42] This was pleasing to Hizbullah and Iran, who may have long recognized that the former cannot take over Lebanon completely but wished that it did sufficiently to serve their interests. But Saudi Arabia has contested this state of affairs, using its relationship with the Sunni family of Saad Hariri, over which it holds extensive power. This took a dramatic turn in November 2017, with Saudi displeasure at what they saw as Hariri's acquiescence to Hizbullah, flaring up into his forced resignation from the prime-ministership.[43] Lebanon is being torn asunder by the regional Iran-Saudi confrontation, with negative implications for the restoration of functioning domestic political processes, let alone its democratic processes.

Jordan

Jordan's internal politics were also affected indirectly by the 2011 uprisings, albeit in different ways than were seen in Lebanon. The diverse political systems in Lebanon and Jordan are one explanation for why the countries were affected differently by the uprisings. Jordan is a monarchy and the king rules over a semi-authoritarian political system and a stratified society.[44] Despite a series of partial democratic openings during the 1990s, Jordanian Parliament remains weak. Political parties and members of parliament tend to identify and align themselves through patronage rather than ideology, with independent "tribal" members forming the majority in that body. The Muslim Brotherhood and its political party, the Islamic Action Front, have constituted a long-standing and, in some ways, loyal opposition, being able to elect some of their candidates into parliament. However, they are no paragons of democracy themselves, as their political ideology remains profoundly conservative despite a democratic patina.[45] Freedom of expression and other civil freedoms tend to be restricted,

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40 International Crisis Group, *Lebanon's Hizbollah Turns Eastward to Syria*, Middle East Report No.153, Brussels, International Crisis Group, 27 May 2014, p.8.

41 Ibid.

42 David Gardner, "Lebanese Pluck Leader Michel Aoun from Pages of Nation's History", *Financial Times*, 2 November 2016, https://www.ft.com/content/988c5958-a05a-11e6-86d5-4e36b35c3550 (Accessed on 24 November 2017).

43 Tamara Qiblawi and Hamdi Alkhshali, "Lebanese PM held 'captive' in Saudi, president says", *CNN*, 15 November 2017, https://edition.cnn.com/2017/11/15/middleeast/lebanon-saudi-arabia-hariri-aoun/index.html (Accessed on 1 February 2018).

44 Amr Hamzawy and Nathan J. Brown, "A Boon or a Bane for Democracy?", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.19, No.3, 2008, p.49-54.

45 European Union Election Observation Mission, "The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Parliamentary Election 20 September 2016 Final Report", 20 September 2016, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eu_eom_jordan_2016_final_report_eng.pdf (Accessed on 31 January 2018).

and civil society is weak. Many of the Jordanian "NGOs" are sponsored by the regime and others subsist through foreign lifelines while others tend to be linked to the Islamic movement, broadly conceived.[46]

Protests in Jordan in 2011 were not nearly as extensive as in Egypt, Syria or elsewhere in the Arab world but they did alarm the regime. The king dismissed the unpopular government of Samir Rifai in February of that year and instructed its replacement to carry out reforms; a series of constitutional amendments followed, strengthening judicial authorities and political and civil rights.[47] These changes were limited, however, and did not substantially dent the hold of the monarchy on the political process; the king still appoints the prime minister and the cabinet.[48] The regime was particularly alarmed by what appeared to be rumblings of dissatisfaction among its traditional supporters, the so-called "East Jordanians" (as opposed to the Jordanians of Palestinian origin who constitute the majority of the population). Elections took place in January 2013 but the Islamic Action Front boycotted them (as it had the 2010 elections).[49] The September 2016 elections saw the Brotherhood abandon its boycott and win a modest plurality; but, again, within a very fragmented parliament and within very restricted political parameters.[50] Six years later, it appears that the events of 2011 have not really changed the basic contours of internal Jordanian politics — although it may be said that they have inspired some of the youth to try to dislodge existing structures, particularly in the context of civil society.[51]

The second way in which the 2011 uprisings impacted Jordan was through the Syrian crisis. The country has been severely affected by the influx of refugees from Syria. Although this has energized civil society in some ways (even though it is international NGOs and international organizations which carry the heaviest load), the refugee crisis has stretched Jordan's meagre resources to the limit and has caused internal political stresses and strains. Note, however, that according to some analysts, the refugees are helping shore up the regime, by allowing it to blame pre-existing problems with the economy and resources on the refugees.[52] Jordan's politics may not yet be in crisis, but the stagnation that characterizes its political system does not bode well for the prospects of Jordan taking meaningful steps towards democratization.

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46 Heba W. AlNasser, "New Social Enterprises in Jordan Redefining the Meaning of Civil Society", September 2016, *Chatham House*, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/2016-09-28-jordan-civil-society-al-nasser-final.pdf (Accessed on 31 January 2018).

47 Marwan Muasher, "Jordan's Proposed Constitutional Amendments – A First Step in the Right Direction", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 17 August 2011, http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/08/17/jordan-s-proposed-constitutional-amendments-first-step-in-right-direction-pub-45366 (Accessed on 24 November 2017).

48 "The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Constitutional Amendments of 2011", *International Labour Organization*, http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=91041 (Accessed on 14 May 2018).

49 Richard Spencer, "Jordan election boycotted by Islamists", *The Telegraph*, 23 January 2013, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/jordan/9822070/Jordan-election-boycotted-by-Islamists.html (Accessed on 31 January 2018).

50 Kirk H. Sowell, "Takeaways from Jordan's Elections", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 30 September 2016, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/64749 (Accessed on 24 November 2017).

51 AlNasser, "New Social Enterprises in Jordan".

52 Simone Hüser, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on Jordan: In Reference to the Regime's Structural Deficits", Beck and Seeberg (Eds.) *The Levant in Turmoil,* p.79-99.

Israel

Israel is a mature democracy with full institutional checks and balances in place for the protection of the rule of law and the respect of civil liberties. Civil society is vibrant and active. The problem with Israeli democracy, however, is that the Palestinian minority does not enjoy the same rights as the Jewish majority. Furthermore, continuing Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Golan Heights, as well as the blockade of Gaza, have pernicious effects on democratic culture and institutions in Israel as a whole.[53]

Israel did not totally escape the turmoil that swept through the Middle East in 2011 as small social protests took place in the country during the summer of that year. These protests were mostly driven by socio-economic grievances and declining living standards. However, they were minor and did not lead to substantial political change: The Likud-led coalition government of Benjamin Netanyahu, which had come to power in 2009, had its mandate renewed after elections held in 2013 and 2015.[54] The Netanyahu government is part and parcel of the rightward trend of Israeli politics over the past decade, which has occurred within both the secular and the religious segments of society.[55] Nationalist and religious parties have become prominent partners in Netanyahu's three coalition governments. Naftali Bennett's *Habayit Hayehudi* (Jewish Home), a right leaning, religious, Zionist, and pro-settlement party, represents "the return of the national religious camp to mainstream Israel over the past 10 years".[56] Avigdor Lieberman heads *Yisrael Beytenu* (Israel is Our Home), an ultra-nationalist, secularist and anti-Arab party.[57] The ultra-orthodox SHAS party also continues to play an important role in Israeli politics.

Although a two-state solution is still the preference of the majority,[58] Israel's shift to the right is connected, either as cause or effect, to the fact that the country has failed to take meaningful steps towards achieving it.[59] Half of Israeli Jews think that Arabs (the Palestinian minority) should be

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53 In this section, I will not be discussing the Palestinian minority in Israel separately. For background reading on this minority, see Gideon Doron, "Two Civil Societies and One State: Jews and Arabs in the State of Israel" Augustus R. Norton (Ed.) *Civil Society in the Middle East,* Vol.2, Leiden, Brill, 1996, p.193-220; and Yakub Halabi, "Democracy, Clan Politics and Weak Governance: The Case of the Arab Municipalities in Israel", *Israel Studies*, Vol.19, No.1, 2014, p.98-125.

54 Jodi Rudoren, "Netanyahu Soundly Defeats Chief Rival in Israeli Elections", *The New York Times*, 17 March 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/18/world/middleeast/israel-election-netanyahu-herzog.html?mtrref=www.google.co.uk&assetType=nyt_now (Accessed on 31 January 2018); Yehuda Ben Meir, "Israel: the 2015 elections", *The Institute for National Security Studies,* 29 March 2015, http://www.inss.org.il/publication/israel-the-2015-elections/ (Accessed on 1 February 2018).

55 Guy Ben-Borat, "Religion, Secularization and Liberal Democracy in Israel", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol.18 No.2, 2013, p.242-258.

56 Natan Sachs, "Religious Politics at a Crossroads in Israel", *Brookings Institution*, 9 October 2013, https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/religious-politics-at-a-crossroads-in-israel/ (Accessed on 29 November 2017).

57 Ishaan Tharoor, "A Guide to the Political Parties Battling for Israel's Future", *The Washington Post*, 14 March 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/03/13/these-are-the-political-parties-battling-for-israels-future/?utm_term=.c7fb91a579e2 (Accessed on 29 November 2017).

58 Mazal Mualem, "Israelis Support Netanyahu, but also Two-state Solution", *Al Monitor*, 30 May 2017, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/05/israel-palestinians-two-state-solution-benjamin-netanyahu.html (Accessed 28 November 2017); "Palestinian-Israeli Pulse: A Join Poll", *Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research*, 25 January 2018 http://www.pcpsr.org/sites/default/files/Summary_%20English_Joint%20PAL-ISR%20Poll%204Jan2018.pdf (Accessed on 14 May 2018).

59 The Economist, "The Evolution of Israeli Politics", *The Economist*, 15 March 2015, http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2015/03/economist-explains-11 (Accessed on 29 November 2017). See also "Politics in Israel is Increasingly Nationalist", *The Economist*, 20 May 2017, https://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21722031-israels-politicians-promote-religion-and-intolerance-politics-israel-increasingly (Accessed on 31 January 2018).

expelled or transferred from Israel; a plurality of Israeli Jews (42 percent) believe settlements on the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem improve the security of Israel, while 30 percent disagree and 25 percent believe that settlements have no impact on Israeli security.[60] The occupation of the West Bank is deepening, in line with the objectives of the religious right, and in particular, Naftali Bennett (though this does not mean that Bennett's "annexationism" has become the dominant position in the country).

The bigger issue here is Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian land and in particular its settlement policy in the West Bank, which should belong to a future Palestinian state. Israeli democracy will remain flawed as long as the country continues to act as an occupier thanks to the "fatally corrosive effect the suppression of Palestine has on Israeli society".[61] In circular fashion, this corrosion reduces the prospect of resolution of Israel's conflicts with the Palestinians. Support for settlements in the West Bank has grown in Israel among the secular segments of society as well as the religious ones that have traditionally favoured them.[62]

Palestine

The West Bank and Gaza Strip are run by the Palestinian Authority (PA), led by Al-Fatah, and Hamas respectively, though one must immediately qualify this by saying that their control is very limited. The Palestinian Authority has limited jurisdiction over some areas of the West Bank, which, along with East Jerusalem, remains in many other ways under Israeli occupation. Hamas does control Gaza internally but the borders of the territory are closed and policed by Israel. This unique governance situation, together with various factors internal to Palestinian society, has thwarted the development of democratic processes and institutions, though the causes of this phenomenon are also to be found in factors internal to Palestinian society and resulting from Palestinian political choices.[63]

The territorial split between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas is one of the outcomes of the parliamentary elections of January 2006, which Hamas won.[64] The crisis that ensued after the elections led to the withdrawal of Hamas to Gaza in 2007. Since that time, only local elections have taken place in Palestine. When the PA organized the last of these local elections in May 2017, they were not held in Gaza as a result of Hamas's non-participation. This decision was made on the rationale that national reconciliation between the PA and Hamas should be a precondition for any election.[65]

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60 "Israel's Religiously Divided Society", *Pew Research Center Polling and Analysis*, 8 March 2016, http://www.pewforum. org/2016/03/08/israels-religiously-divided-society/ (Accessed on 24 November 2017).

61 Shlomo Ben Ami, "Israel at a Crossroads", *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, No 27, 2017, https://www.thecairoreview. com/essays/israel-at-a-crossroads/ (Accessed on 28 November 2017).

62 Callie Maidhof, "Settlement Secularism", *Middle East Report*, No.269, 2013, p.30-34.

63 Human Rights Council, "Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Michael Lynk", 16 March 2017, https://www.google.co.uk/ url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiI9q_VutXYAhXqDsAKHU1LA hQQFgg0MAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ohchr.org%2FEN%2FHRBodies%2FHRC%2FRegularSessions%2FSess ion34%2FDocuments%2FA_HRC_34_70_AUV.docx&usg=AOvVaw3YVysM7SG5A-78gCOJN9Mz (Accessed on 1 February 2018).

64 "Hamas sweeps to election victory", *BBC*, 26 January 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4650788. stm (Accessed on 31 January 2018).

65 Ali Sawafta and Nidal al-Mughrabi, "Palestinians hold local elections in West Bank but not Gaza", *Reuters*, 13 May 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-politics-election/palestinians-hold-local-elections-in-west-bank-but-not-gaza-idUSKBN189066 (Accessed on 21 November 2017).

Various attempts at reconciliation have indeed occurred; the most recent one in October 2017, which appears to have some potential of enduring and ending the rift in the Palestinian national movement.[66]

There was no political uprising in Palestine in 2011 but it was also indirectly affected by the events of that year through the implosion of Syria. The outbreak of the civil war precipitated Hamas's departure from the Syrian and Iranian orbit — Hamas leader Khaled Mishaal had left Damascus by January 2012[67] — although there has since been a partial restoration of relations. The situation between Israel and Hamas remains fraught, with occasional flare-ups of military conflict in the past few years. For example, clashes erupted between the two parties in November 2012, in July-August 2014, and again in April 2018.[68] Israel-Hamas relations have also been indirectly shaped by the consequences of the Egyptian uprising: Hamas lost a valuable ally with the overthrow of the Morsi government and gained an unsympathetic neighbour when the al-Sisi government came to power.

The resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a return to the peace process depends on the existence of a degree of democratic accountability within the whole of Palestine. The process cannot proceed without Palestinian national unity; and, for peace to hold, the Palestinian people in their entirety must be "carried" by their leadership towards a deal. This requires a degree of engagement on the part of the Palestinian citizenry as well as accountable and open governance by the Palestinian leadership. It is in this broad sense that the resolution of the most long-standing and intractable conflict in the Levant, and the restoration of a degree of regional order, is contingent on at least a measure of democratization.[69]

Conclusion

The paper showed that the prospects for democratization in the Levant are, at the present moment in time, not promising, albeit for different reasons in each case. The initial hopeful expectations for Egypt and Syria after 2011 have been crushed by the internal conflicts, hurting the prospects for democratization in the short term. In cases where the uprisings did not have a direct impact, such as in Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and Palestine, democratization processes have stalled due to various internal

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66 "Hamas, Fatah sign reconciliation agreement in Cairo", *Al Jazeera*, 12 October 2017, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/hamas-fatah-sign-reconciliation-agreement-cairo-171012115017367.html (Accessed on 31 January 2018).

67 Fares Akram, "Hamas Leader Abandons Longtime Base in Damascus", *New York Times,* 27 January 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/28/world/middleeast/khaled-meshal-the-leader-of-hamas-vacates-damascus.html (Accessed on 25 November 2017).

68 Lizzie Dearden, "Israel-Gaza conflict: 50-day war by numbers", *Independent*, 27 August 2014, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/israel-gaza-conflict-50-day-war-by-numbers-9693310.html (Accessed on 2 February 2018); Haroon Siddique, Paul Owen and Tom McCarthy, "Israel and Gaza conflict: Truce broken during Egyptian PM's visit - as it happened", *The Guardian*, 16 November 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/16/israel-gaza-conflict-egyptian-pm-solidarity-visit-live (Accessed on 2 February 2018); David M. Halbfinger, Iyad Abuheweila and Jugal K. Patel, "300 Meters in Gaza: Snipers, Burning Tires and a Contested Fence", *The New York Times*, 13 April, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/04/13/world/middleeast/gaza-fence-aerial.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FGaza%20Strip&action=click&contentCollection=world&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=3&pgtype=collection (Accessed on 14 May 2018).

69 Perry Cammack, Nathan J. Brown and Marwan Muasher (Eds.), *Revitalizing Palestinian Nationalism: Options Versus Realities*, Washington DC, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2017; Grant Rumley and Mor Yahalom, "Palestine's Democratic Deficit: Why Fatah Won't Hold Elections", *Foreign Affairs*, 12 October 2016, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/palestinian-authority/2016-10-12/palestines-democratic-deficit (Accessed on 26 November 2017).

factors but also external ones — factors that are often related to indirect effects of the uprisings, particularly the domestic political challenges that arose as a result of the Syrian Civil War.

The turmoil that has accompanied the downturn in the prospects of democratization in the Levant, however, does not imply that a regional order can be constructed through the restoration of authoritarian rule. The resolutions of the many conflicts that permeate the Levant (both internal and external, even though in practice they are often indistinguishable) require a measure of democratization, so that there exists a degree of governmental accountability, pluralism, and respect for basic freedoms and good governance. The region will not emerge from its present state of disorder and instability without it. This refers to internal conflicts such as in Syria, and external ones such as between Israel and the Palestinians.

The state system in the Levant, for all its problematic historical origins, remains the only available framework of political organization in the region. Democratization processes will get back on track within the parameters of either existing borders and/or internally re-organized nation-states; this is the case particularly for Syria. Democratization will lead to the strengthening of social cohesion by reducing the appeal of particularist identities and by decreasing the opportunities for foreign intervention. This, in turn, will render powers from outside the region - such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia, the United States and Turkey - less able to use proxies in the Levant to pursue their own interests and agendas and thereby bolster the potential for the establishment of a regional order.